



Who are Your Recommenders?

When applying for jobs or internships, you may be asked to provide references or letters of recommendation. If you are planning to apply to graduate or professional schools, letters of recommendation are essential to preparing a strong application. The key is to plan ahead: most people will not write a letter or serve as a reference unless they know you well enough to judge your capabilities for success in the workplace or academia. While at Ohio State, you should establish relationships with 3-4 people, each of whom can be a recommender for you.

A reference is an individual willing to provide an employer with a positive view of your work ethic, abilities, skills, knowledge, and general character. Normally, the reference will be contacted directly by the employer (usually by phone or e-mail) with specific questions regarding your background.

A letter of recommendation (sometimes called a letter of reference) is a personalized letter regarding your skills and accomplishments, directed to a specific school or employer, from an individual who has agreed to support your application.

Identifying potential recommenders

- When doing reference checks, employers prefer to contact sources they consider to be impartial. First choice should be given to current or former supervisors at job, internship, or volunteer sites. Faculty members who can describe how you compare to other students in terms of in-class participation, course work, or your other accomplishments can also be used. You can also consider campus administrators or other staff (e.g., advisors) with whom you have worked closely.
- Choose those who can emphasize relevant aspects of your skills, knowledge areas, and experiences. For example, those seeking admission to graduate programs in the sciences should have at least one recommender who is familiar with their research skills. Similarly, those looking for employment in law enforcement should have recommenders who can attest to their moral character, assertiveness, etc.
- You will need to form relationships with potential recommenders over time. This can be done by making regular use of a faculty member's office hours and/or volunteering to assist with their research, as this will allow them to understand more fully your strengths. Similarly, you can request to meet periodically with workplace supervisors to get feedback on how you can be a better employee or, if they have experience working in your target career field, to get their advice on ways you can increase your qualifications, etc.
- Don't make the mistake of focusing exclusively on recommenders who are well known in their field. It is better to have a detailed recommendation from someone who knows you well, appraises you positively, and will take the time to share a thoughtful evaluation.

Contacting each potential recommender

- Well in advance of when you'll be submitting applications, contact each person and politely ask if they are willing to be included on your list of references or provide a recommendation letter in the future. It's best to initiate such discussions at least a month before you plan to start applying to graduate/professional schools or actively searching for a job/internship.
- Most people will not agree to be a recommender unless they think they can make positive statements about your qualifications. With those who agree, pay careful attention to how they respond to your request. Do they seem genuinely interested in helping you? Do you sense any reservations on their end (either because they have a busy schedule or may not know you well enough)?
- It is best to ask in such a way that anyone who is hesitant about serving as a recommender can easily address their reservations with you. Consider using a query like, "If you feel you know me well enough, I'd greatly appreciate a recommendation letter from you. Will you be able to provide a letter for me?"

Getting organized

- For those recommenders agreeing to speak to reference checkers, prepare a packet that includes your resume, list of references (see sample on the last page of this document), a description of the position you are seeking, and copies of other pertinent application materials (e.g., cover letter). Do not assume a reference will remember you or your career goals unless you provide them with specific information.
- For those recommenders agreeing to provide recommendation letters, you should prepare a packet that includes the documents listed above as well as your personal statement and a description of the specific program to which you are applying (it is fine to include a print out from the school's web site). Consider including other materials that will help your recommender advocate for your academic capabilities (e.g., list of academic honors, research papers, etc.)
- Many graduate and professional schools require applicants to provide a confidential letter of recommendation. A confidential document is one that is provided on your behalf, but you do not get to read it. Even when not a hard and fast application requirement, confidential documents are usually preferred by selection committees.
- When asking a faculty member to write a letter for you, they may question you about use of a dossier service. One service that many faculty are familiar with is Interfolio. Dossier services are commonly used by faculty and graduate students who are seeking academic positions. At one time, use of these services were also a core component of the process undergrads followed when seeking admission to graduate and professional schools. Now that the majority of graduate and professional programs either use recommendation systems maintained by their own universities or the consortiums they are affiliated with (e.g., LSAC), few undergrads will benefit from setting up a private dossier service to support their applications. Grad students are encouraged to research the value of using dossier services like chroniclevitae.com (free) or Interfolio (fee-based), especially if they are pursuing academic positions in disciplines (e.g., the humanities) where the norm is to apply to dozens of faculty or instructor positions at a time.
- Many graduate schools maintain their own systems for collecting confidential recommendations that require completion of an online form and uploading a letter of recommendation. The same holds true for some employers (e.g., Teach for America).
- To make it easy for your recommenders, you should make a list of instructions for them to follow – especially if you are requesting their assistance with multiple applications (Which schools require use of an in-house recommendation system? How do they access that system? When is each recommendation due?).
- All materials should be given to the recommender at least three weeks in advance. It is unprofessional to ask recommenders to respond to last minute requests. If any materials need to be sent via postal mail, you should provide a stamped addressed envelope and give the recommender your materials at least four weeks in advance!

Communicating with your recommenders

- After someone agrees to be a recommender, send them a quick thank you note. If you haven't already done so, give them the packet of materials described in the Getting Organized section above.
- Most online application systems will notify you when a recommendation letter has been received. For those that collect materials via e-mail, you should check in with them a couple weeks prior to the deadline to ensure your materials were received. If not, contact your recommenders with a gentle reminder.
- Keep in mind that many situations may arise for these individuals, causing delays in completing the process. For instance, depending on the time of the semester, faculty may be busy developing exams or grading papers. If someone cannot provide a letter by the application deadline, it's possible that the organization you are applying to will give an extension – especially if all your other materials have been received.
- When you have good news to share related to your job search or admission to a post-baccalaureate program, let them know, and show appreciation for their role in helping you get there.

General guidelines

- Do not give the name of any individual as a reference without their prior approval.
- Do not list family or friends as references.
- Often an individual is advocating for several others at the same time. If you make the process easy for your recommenders, they will likely make the time needed to provide you with a strong endorsement.
- Take your list of references to interviews. If an employer is impressed with your interview and ready to proceed to the next step, having the list will move the process along and demonstrate your motivation to get the job. At the close of the interview, pull out the list and simply ask, "Would you like a copy of my references?"
- It is possible that an individual will deny your request to be a reference or provide a letter of recommendation because it is against their company policy.
- Secure letters of recommendation before you leave Ohio State. The longer you wait, the harder it will be for people to remember specifics about your personality and other factors that typically are not captured in resumes and other documents.
- Some employers use LinkedIn as part of their candidate screening process. If any of your current or former supervisors have profiles on LinkedIn, request to connect with them. Once connected, they may elect to use the LinkedIn tool that allows them to endorse your various skills.

SAMPLE:

190 W. 17th Avenue
Columbus, OH 43210

BRUTUS BUCKEYE

BUCKEYE.1@osu.edu
614/292-7055

REFERENCES:

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Beaker.xx@osu.edu
(thesis research advisor)

Ms. Helen Reader
Librarian
The Ohio State University Main Library
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(former supervisor)

Mr. Don Frye
Manager
Champps Americana
1827 Olentangy River Road
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(current supervisor)

NOTES:

THIS IS AN INDEPENDENT DOCUMENT FROM YOUR RESUME. BE SURE TO INCLUDE YOUR NAME AND IT'S PURPOSE IN THE DOCUMENT TITLE

[E.G., BRUTUS BUCKEYE REFERENCES.doc]

INCLUDING INFORMATION ABOUT HOW EACH REFERENCE KNOWS YOU WILL MAKE IT EASIER FOR THE REFERENCE CHECKER TO PRIORITIZE WHO TO CONTACT